

Legislation stops "Medical ID" *Paul measure stops intrusion into private medical histories*
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WASHINGTON, DC - Saying that Americans have the right to privacy in the medical lives, free of fear from prying eyes in the government, US Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) on Tuesday introduced the Patient Privacy Act (H.R. 4281) to stop a proposed "medical national ID." US Rep. Bob Stump (R-Arizona) is as an original cosponsor of the legislation

The proposed ID program arises from the 1996 "Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act." The '96 law calls for the creation of a "standard unique health care identifier" for all Americans. This identifier would create a national database containing the medical history of all Americans.

Rep. Paul, a physician, said the program creates a uniquely horrifying prospect for future privacy losses.

"Suddenly, the medical history of all Americans will be accessible to anyone with a grudge, or with mischievous or criminal intent. It would allow federal bureaucrats and possibly every medical professional, hospital, and HMO in the country to access an individual's record simply by entering the 'identifier' into a national database," said Paul. "I ask my colleagues, how comfortable would you be confiding any emotional problem - or even an embarrassing physical problem like impotence - to your doctor if you knew that this information could be easily accessed by friend, political foe, possible employers, coworkers, HMOs, and even government agents?"

Such a system could have a chilling effect on people's desire to get treatment for potentially life-threatening conditions.

"As a physician, I know well that oftentimes effective treatment depends on a patient's ability to place absolute trust in his or her doctor. But how can there be trust when patients know that any and all information given the doctor will be placed in a database accessible to anyone with the patient's 'identifier?'"

Despite assurances from the medical ID proponents, Paul said that nothing could possibly be

done to alleviate the potential abuses of the system.

"History has shown that attempts to protect the privacy of information collected by the government are ineffective at protecting citizens from the prying eyes of government officials. Think of the numerous cases of IRS abuses that have recently been brought to Congress' attention, or the history of abuse of FBI files in the Executive Branch, or even the case of a Medicaid clerk in Maryland who accessed a computerized database and sold patient names to an HMO."

Paul said Congress must act quickly to protect the rights of Americans from prying eyes.

"The federal government has no authority to endanger the privacy of personal medical information by forcing all citizens to adopt a uniform health identifier for use in a national data base. A uniform health ID endangers constitutional liberties, threatens doctor-patient relationships, and opens the door to federal officials accessing to deeply personal medical information for political purposes," said Paul. "There can be no justification for risking the rights of private citizens."

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